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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an investigation of problem finding in art. The concept of empathy with oneself is hypothesized as the means by which artists perceive problems. This concept is then used to analyze the origins of Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury" and van Gogh's "The Starry Night" as well as the origins of art works composed by artists during well-known psychological studies of creativity and the origins of stories told for the blank card of the "Thematic Apperception Test" by creatively inclined college students. In each case, preliminary evidence found that problems originate as descriptions of conflicting feelings within the artist. Empathy with oneself is concluded on this basis to be a useful way to characterize the affective state of problem finding in art. A 34-item list of references is included. (Author)

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Problem Finding and Empathy in Art

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Running Head: PROBLEM FINDING

Paper presented at the Henry B. and Jocelyn Wallace National Research Symposium on Talent Development, University of Iowa, May 16, 1991.

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Abstract

This chapter describes an investigation of problem finding in art. The concept of "empathy with oneself" is hypothesized as the means by which artists perceive problems. This concept is then used to analyze the origins of Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury and van Gogh's The Starry Night; the origins of art works composed by artists during well-known psychological studies of creativity; and the origins of stories told for the blank card of the Thematic Apperception Test by creatively inclined college students. In each case, preliminary evidence was found that problems originate as descriptions of conflicting feelings within the artist. "Empathy with oneself" was concluded on this basis to be a useful way to characterize the affective state of problem finding in art.

Problem Finding and Empathy in Art

Traditional accounts suggest that problem finding begins with feeling. The expressions "sensing gaps," "dissatisfaction with the status quo," or "frustration or irritation that something doesn't work as it might," are commonly used to describe problem finding. The relation of feeling to problem finding is virtually unexplored territory for psychological research, and little has been done to define the affective state of the creative thinker in relation to his or her chosen problem. In the following essay, I would like to pursue the question of how problems are perceived in literary and visual arts through an examination of the concept of empathy or sympathetic understanding. To arrive at a better understanding of the relation of empathy to problem finding in literary and visual arts, this pursuit will take the reader first to background information on the role historically accorded sympathetic understanding by literary critics, then through an analysis of "empathy with oneself" in the process of making art.

Historical Background

Historically, discussions of empathy in literary criticism were preceded by discussions of "sympathetic

imagination" (Margulies, 1989). What is somewhat surprising about this body of literature is how long ago philosophers and literary critics began discussing sympathetic imagination, and also how wide a range of persons, places, and things -- fictive and real -- were considered to be the objects of "sympathy" as a form of understanding.

Basing his review on the pioneering work of Bate (1945), Engell (1981) cited a number of philosophers and literary critics of the 18th century who considered sympathetic imagination as the means by which individuals either create or appreciate characters or situations. Adam Smith (1723-1790), well known for his economic theory, thought that "the more accurately and completely our imagination reproduces the circumstances of another in our mind, the more readily the feeling of sympathy is excited. Imagination, therefore, encourages us to know a situation, to ascertain events surrounding a person" (Engell, 1981, p. 150). In this early view, imagination was the means to evoke sympathetic feeling. This view maintained a separation between imagination and sympathy, giving them a sequential order in the development of understanding.

Other philosophers and critics apparently made no separation between imagination and sympathy. Engell (1981)

noted that the philosopher and literary critic Alexander Gerard (1728-1795) thought sympathy could be "with a person or with a situation" (1981, p. 152). Similarly, the philosopher/ chemist Joseph Priestly (1733-1804) used the concept of "sensibility" to explain how an individual "adapts himself to the situation he is viewing" (Engell, 1981, p. 156). Even the ancient notion of poetic enthusiasm (as expressed by Plato) was, in the 18th century, "seen as a part of that sympathetic power of the imagination to get out of itself and feel its way strongly and vividly into other people and even into the forms of nature" (Engell, 1981, p. 156).

Although Bate and Engell both went to lengths to distinguish "sympathetic imagination" from empathy, particularly through the intellectual history of empathy as a derivative of einfuhlung (a German concept of aesthetic appreciation), it is equally clear that both believed that empathy and sympathetic imagination overlapped. Furthermore, what from a critical and historical perspective might be described as "sympathetic imagination" might today be better described as empathy (Margulies, 1989), due to increasing acceptance for a definition of empathy outside the narrow range of aesthetic appreciation. In this sense,

Margulies (1989, p. 15) used "imaginative empathy" to describe Keats' ability to discover the inner existence of another -- even if that other happened to be a sparrow ("I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel") or a billiard ball ("it may have a sense of delight from its own roundness, smoothness")!

Sympathy was considered a particularly useful tool for a poetic imagination, but its use by critics in the 18th century was particularly limited to the character of a person, thing, or situation in its nonproblematic aspects. There were, then, limits on the 18th-century discussions of "sympathetic imagination" that now make the concept appear quaint or outdated. For all the elaboration of the concept as a source of poetic inspiration, it was limited in its ability to describe problematic feelings or situations, or a relation to oneself. The concept was not generally used to describe the apprehension of problematic situations in terms of the mixed feelings, uncertainty, and inner conflicts of a character or viewer. When 18th-century critics discussed Shakespeare, for example, they conceived of an ability to pursue a sequence of "passions" in a character, or in the words of Gerard, a "fluctuation of mind" (Bate, 1945, p. 160), but there was very little found by Bate or Engell to

indicate the perception of emotional conflict, such as a 20th-century critic might find in the role of Hamlet.

Only Freud brought to art criticism a nascent appreciation of emotional conflict as a wellspring of creativity, but he did not associate this view of art with the process of sympathetic understanding. In "The Moses of Michelangelo," which was published anonymously, Freud wrote that what an artist "aims at is to awaken in us the same emotional attitude, the same mental constellation as that which in him produced the impetus to create" (Freud, 1914/1955, p. 212).

For Freud, the "constellation" always presented a conflict to be resolved through analysis of "emotional strata," yet the means for apprehending the tensions between strata implied a sympathetic form of understanding. Only later, in another context, did Freud write that empathy "plays the largest part in our understanding of what is inherently foreign to our ego in other people" (1921/1955, p. 108), and that only through empathy are we "enabled to take up any attitude at all towards another mental life" (p. 110fn.). The reader may sense here the conflict between empathy and psychoanalysis which, in the end, left empathy a "neglected and unsolved theoretical problem" for Freud

(Margulies, 1989, p. 4).

Other 20th-century treatments of empathy in psychology more closely associated it with the perception of problems, but neglected its relationship to art. Rogers (1942, p. 76), for example, wrote that one criterion for counseling was that an individual be "under a degree of tension, arising from incompatible personal desires, or from the conflict of social and environmental demands with individual needs." Somewhat later, he described the role of the counselor as:

> To assume, in so far as he is able, the internal frame of reference of the client, to perceive the world as the client sees it, to perceive the client himself as he is seen by himself, to lay aside all perceptions from the external frame of reference while doing so, and to communicate something of this empathic understanding to the client. (Rogers, 1951, p. 29)

The role of empathic understanding in counseling was to perceive and reflect the tension between feelings. The role of empathy as a means to apprehend the personal problems of the client, and to aid the client in accurate problem formulation (1951, pp. 104, 145), was implicit rather than explicit, and it was never explicitly connected with

creativity, even though Rogers (1959) later wrote on that subject.

Empathy with Oneself

Only recently has empathy been described in somewhat clearer relationship to problem perception in psychotherapy. Kohut (1971), for example, defined empathy as "a mode of cognition which is specifically attuned to the perception of complex psychological configurations" (p. 300). For Kohut, sympathetic understanding was essential to perceive accurately another self in all of its complexity. The concept of empathy as a means for perceiving complex mental or emotional states was emerging only in the second half of the 20th century (Margulies, 1989, p. 4).

Additional light is shed on the nature of problem finding in art through Margulies' (1989, Chap. 7) discussion of the problem of "empathy with oneself." Margulies found such a concept emerging in discussions by clinicians in its negative aspect to describe a lack of compassion with one's own inner experiences, as in the phrase, "she is not able to empathize with herself" (p. 108):

> Sometimes an intersystemic conflict is implied, a superego harshness that is noted in retrospect as the treatment progresses, as the person becomes better

able to empathize with himself. Sometimes it symbolizes a therapeutic movement toward wholeness and integration, the self knitting its pieces together. This usage of empathy appears to be new, but was defended by Margulies as "a linguistic solution to an enigma." This usage of empathy acknowledged a negative use of the term as a fundamental way to describe the denial of conflict or tension. A further meaning was implied by this usage: empathy as a means to perceive conflict in the self, a first step toward conflict resolution.

Many clinicians would agree that as a client feels increasingly understood, he or she is more likely to seek to understand the self through an attempt to understand the therapist's view of the self (Margulies, 1989). The eventual adoption of empathy by the client in relation to the self permits accessibility to inner experiences which are repressed or, in Rogers' (1959) terms, "prevented from coming into awareness except in distorted fashion" (p. 75). The result is an openness to experience in the client. This openness permits "a tolerance for ambiguity," and "an ability to receive much conflicting information without forcing closure on the situation" (p. 75). The idea of empathy as a "natural" means to perceive conflicting

feelings is very close to problem perception by the artist.

Empathy with Oneself and the Origins of Art

The relationship between empathy for the self in conflict and problem finding in art can be explored using recent research on Faulkner's (1929/1984) novel The Sound and the Fury. Faulkner's own view of this novel gave it a special place among his works. In several interviews in the 1950's (Bleikasten, 1982, pp. 15-19), he acknowledged it to be the novel he "felt tenderest toward," and critics tend to acknowledge it today as his first great novel, if not his greatest.

In 1933, he wrote several versions of an unpublished preface for what was to be a limited edition of The Sound and the Fury. Although Faulkner later dismissed the value of this preface, it has been the source of considerable scholarship regarding the origins of the novel. In the several versions, Faulkner offered somewhat contradictory explanations for the genesis of the novel. One common element among the different versions was Faulkner's famous admission that because of earlier, negative experiences with publishers, he wrote the work without a thought to publication: "One day, I seemed to shut a door between me and all publishers' addresses and book lists. I said to

myself, Now I can write" (Faulkner, 1933/1982, p. 10). According to his own accounts, Faulkner wrote the book for himself: "I, who had never had a sister and was fated to lose my daughter in infancy, set out to make myself a beautiful and tragic little girl" (p. 10). That girl's name, of course, was Caddy, who was given three brothers.

Cohen and Fowler (1990) recently uncovered additional manuscript versions of the introduction, and these suggest that the three brothers were various self- representations. In one manuscript portion (Cohen & Fowler, 1990, p. 277), Faulkner described the genesis of the setting and the brothers in relation to Caddy:

> I gave her for a background a family doomed to decay and symbolized by a decaying house. I could be in it, the brother and father both. One brother could not contain all that I could feel toward her. I gave her 3: Quentin who loved her as a lover would, Jason who loved her with the same hatred of jealous and outraged pride of a father, and Benjy who loved her with the complete mindlessness of a child.

The choice of three brothers to symbolize feelings that Faulkner himself felt was as intuitive as the choice of the house to represent the family. The revelation of such

personal information in the preface was eventually excised by Faulkner, perhaps because it revealed "more about his own psychic involvement in his art than he preferred to make known" (Cohen & Fowler, 1990, p. 277). The psychic involvement seems to have been primarily of an empathic nature, articulating his "fears and desires" (p. 277) in relation to each other.

That all fictional characters might to some extent be based on empathy with oneself is a hypothesis anticipated by Freud (1908/1959) in his analysis of "Creative Writers and Day-dreaming." In this essay, Freud chose to analyze characters in run-of-the-mill romances, including what he called the "psychological novel." His analysis of stories in this psychological genre included an account of the tendency of "modern writers to split up their ego by self-observation into many component egos, and in this way to personify the conflicting trends in their own mental life in many heroes" (p. 150). Certainly in light of Faulkner's own comments, The Sound and the Fury might qualify as such a novel. Empathy, as a technique to bring such feelings into awareness, was anticipated by psychoanalysis, and empathy with oneself, as described by Margulies (1989), was clearly suggested by Faulkner's remarks cited above.

Might other forms of art be based on problems formulated through empathy with oneself? Another case that suggests empathy with oneself can play a role in problem formulation is Vincent van Gogh's painting The Starry Night. Painted in June, 1889 at St. Remy, where van Gogh entered an asylum to relieve the symptoms of his episodic mental disturbances, the sky in this major work has been described in dynamic terms: "Stars whirl in a thickly painted sky, ploughed by heavy spirals which unroll like monstrous, glistening caterpillars above the sleeping town" (Elgar, 1958, p. 222). In a poem inspired by the painting, Anne Sexton (1981, p. 53) observed that "The town is silent. The night boils with eleven stars."

Using van Gogh's letters, Soth (1986) has made a convincing argument that the painting was conceived as early as April, 1888. Van Gogh (1958, p. 478) wrote his painter friend Bernard that:

> The imagination is certainly a faculty which we must develop, one which alone can lead us to the creation of a more exalting and consoling nature than the single brief glance at reality -- which in our sight is ever changing, passing like a flash of lightning -- can ever let us perceive.

> A starry sky, for instance -- look, that is something I should like to try to do.

Van Gogh painted two starry nights that fall, but neither of them appears to have been the imaginative work envisioned. Several critics have pointed out that The Starry Night is essentially fictive, a work composed by the imagination, combining the view from van Gogh's room with a town in the distance and a cypress in the foreground.

Perhaps more fundamentally, imagination was anticipated as a means to portray feelings that although often perceived in a temporal sequence, could be imaginatively united. Exaltation and consolation (more recently translated in Tilborgh [1990] as "excitement and comfort") were two such feelings that contrasted, but which could perhaps be synthesized in an imaginative portrayal of a starry sky. This artistic problem was the challenge to van Gogh that apparently led to the famous painting of 1889, which hangs in the Museum of Modern Art in New York (see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Critics disagree over the astronomical accuracy of the

placement of stars, but their significance is clarified by a passage in another letter to Bernard (Gogh, 1958, pp. 496-7) in June 1888:

> But seeing that nothing opposes it -- supposing that there are also lines and forms as well as colors on the other innumerable planets and suns -- it would remain praiseworthy of us to maintain a certain serenity with regard to the possibilities of painting under superior and changed conditions of existence, an existence changed by a phenomenon no queerer and no more surprising than the transformation of the caterpillar into a butterfly, or of the white grub into a cockchafer.
>
> The existence of painter-butterfly would have for its field of action one of the innumerable heavenly bodies, which would perhaps be no more inaccessible to us, after death, than the black dots which symblize towns and villages on geographical maps are in our terrestrial existence.

The stars excited possibilities of an afterlife for van Gogh that were closely associated with religious feeling. He confessed to his brother in September 1888 of occasionally "having a terrible need of -- shall I say the word? --

religion. Then I go out at night to paint the stars" (Gogh, 1958, p. 56).

The starry night painted in June 1889 was both a painting of religious feeling and composed through the imagination, as Soth (1986, p. 306) pointed out through an analysis of a letter van Gogh (1958, pp. 182-4) wrote to his brother only a day after the painting was completed. Soth also argued that the painting was a sublimated version of Christ's agony in the garden of Gethsemane, a painting contemplated by van Gogh in 1888. Certain details tend to validate this view, including the sleeping town with its terrestrial comforts (home, family, religious tradition, even sleep), the "funereal cypress" (Gogh, 1958, p. 47) which points to the stars, and even the colors used by van Gogh (noted by Soth, 1986). Given the problematic state of van Gogh's relation to traditional religion (Buser, 1989), however, its more immediate referent was probably van Gogh himself, isolated from such comforts and contemplating the possibility of an afterlife.

What is missing from this analysis is how a synthesis of feeling can be obtained through contemplating the work of art. The calm of the sleeping town is opposed by the movement of the sky, but the stars suggest a resolution that

is both actually and figuratively outside the world of the painting. The resolution of the conflicting feelings excited by the painting lies within the viewer, who might try to identify with the comfort of the town, seeing the church as a refuge or protection. Or the viewer might reject this form of comfort, seeking a refuge in thoughts excited by but not directly represented in the painting. The painting itself only asks us to keep, in van Gogh's phrase, "an open mind." The title, The Starry Night, can thus be seen to be metaphorical, stars representing hope in the unknown and perhaps unknowable.

Empathy with oneself is a means for perceiving inner conflicts and tensions that make good problems, and is a useful concept for interpreting the psychological involvement of an artist in his or her art. It is not without its difficulty, particularly with respect to an awareness of the conflict that some usages of empathy imply. Although Faulkner seemed to have been aware enough of his psychological involvement in The Sound and the Fury to verbalize the tensions after writing the book, and van Gogh shared enough of his personal views of religion and art through his letters to give us some idea of what he was about in The Starry Night, other artists may not be as aware

of the depth of their involvement in their artworks. Symbols for felt tensions may be intuitively apprehended without the tensions themselves entering consciousness.

Psychological Evidence

There is little doubt that artists create from their experiences, and in recent years, their inner experiences have been increasingly acknowledged as the source of their creativity. Much more tentative is the idea that empathic understanding of their own feelings in conflict provides a useful tool for understanding artistic problems. This hypothesis could be tested, although data sources are few. Two sources will be explored here, one published research on the thoughts of artists immediately after they create art, and the other, stories told for the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) blank card (Card No. 16) by creatively inclined college students.

One place to begin a search for psychological evidence of how an artist perceives tensions is Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi's (1976) The Creative Vision, a longitudinal study of young artists begun at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1963. This work is one of the few by psychologists reflecting an appreciation of both the need to comprehend the affective component of problem finding and

the need for empirical study. As part of the experimental procedure, student artists were asked to choose items from an array for a drawing that they would do. One of the students, who scored in the upper third of the experimental group on problem finding, chose a chunk of optical glass as the most important element in his composition. Asked later why he chose it, he indicated that "it leaves its influence on what goes through it" and "distorts what passed behind it" (p. 145). The researchers pointed out that in the final drawing, the glass was "very likely a functional symbol of the artist's own process of experiencing, interpreting and thereby distorting reality" (p. 145). The artist did not empathize with the glass as much as use the glass to stand for his view of himself in his chosen problem.

There is a second level of distortion, however, of which the student artist was at least partially aware. He reported that he "felt exposed by being watched" (p. 144), a feeling perhaps not unrelated to his choice of a chunk of optical glass as the most important element in his composition. The artist as observer was being observed, and this feeling of being under scrutiny had an impact on his art. He said

I felt exposed by being watched, so <u>I emphasized one</u>

> color doubly because I felt bothered. Additional meanings are always incorporated into what I am doing, outside stimuli might change the type of stroke or anything (p. 145, emphasis added).

Here there is a strong indication of feelings initially in conflict -- perhaps curiosity and feeling bothered. The artist seemed to be saying that the researchers' observation of him distorted his art as much as the artist's point of view distorted objects.

In terms of empathy, the artist was clearly aware of not only his own feelings, but the affective impact of "outside stimuli." His empathy with himself gave him the openness to experience that resulted in an artistic problem developed from the experimental situation: How is the view of an object affected by the viewer being viewed? The black and white reproduction of the finished drawing (p. 146) seemed to reflect two successively lighter distortions of a figure at the left, perhaps the effect of emphasizing "one color doubly." If the glass/artist is in the middle of the composition (as noted by the researchers), the element on the left may represent an object, and the element on the right may represent a double (doubly light?) distortion of it.

This interpretation is in accordance with both the art student's stated reasons for choosing the glass (different types of distortion from different directions) and with his philosophy: "I try to define myself in terms of where do I fit." In the composition, he literally fit in the middle, viewing and being viewed as an artist. This interpretation is also consistent with his admission that "my only conscious theme is amalgamation," seeing himself in the center, combining disparate elements in a composition. The disparate elements here do not appear to be different objects in view, as much as different feelings, with the central element representing the artist's "amalgam" at the center.

Another example of conflicting feelings as the source of artistic problems might be taken from research on poets done by Perkins (1981, pp. 66-68). One poet shared her initial idea before the poetry-writing session: "The day proceeds like an air raid drill, because I've been thinking about the way my children sound." Perkins noted that she started writing, My babies are wailing like those air raid drills/I remember. The drills appeared to create anxiety, which was recalled as an affective response to the crying babies. Yet what type of anxiety was being experienced?

Babies cry for their own preservation, but the poet/mother admitted that "basically I can't, I don't tolerate them very well, and it does me in so much that I have to leave them and go into silence, someplace that's silent so I can preserve myself" (p. 68). "Self-preservation," as a title for this poem, might be said to be ambiguous -- whose desire for self-preservation does the cry represent?

The inner conflict appears to have been between the poet/mother's desires to preserve her children and to preserve herself. That two feelings were experienced as an inner conflict was conveyed in her moment of insight about the poem: "It has to do with preserving your own life first" (emphasis added). These words indicate an ordering of priorities along the lines of the "bomb-shelter problem" of the 1950's. A hotly debated issue in the 1950's, the problem of who was to enter the shelter first was a dilemma resolved by admitting the shelter owner (unfairly assumed to be male) rather than women and children first. Presumably, the owner was in the best position to prioritize further entrance, like a captain of the ship. Similarly, the mother's feelings are logically arranged. Preserving oneself (as the head of a household) is a logical solution to the problem, but it also implies a necessary constriction

of feeling for others (empathy).

The last lines of the poem seem to develop the feeling of loneliness or isolation that may come as a result of a logical concern for self-preservation. I am still fighting that cold war/alone. The wailing babies . . . . The emotional isolation implicit in the penultimate line appears to be diminished by the reprise of the first line. The ending represents a return to the beginning, indicating the poet's imminent return to her household and the inner conflict that seems to have motivated the poem.

These analyses of published material on the genesis of artistic problems bring to the foreground the nature of inner tensions as the source of problems. They point the way for further analyses of other cases. In such analyses, a researcher might especially look for the tension within a single element that appears to represent the genesis of the artistic problem and seems to motivate (Runco, in press) the composition as a whole. A search for such internally conflicted elements tests the usefulness of "empathy with oneself" for interpreting the origins of art.

The data base chosen for a search for such ambiguous or conflicted elements was a set of 10 stories told for the blank card of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT; Murray,

1943) by creatively inclined college students (Wakefield, in press). These stories were selected from over 50 told for this card in a study of creative thinking. The 10 stories selected for analysis were chosen on the basis of either who told them (six by fine arts students) or on the basis of their unusual length in relation to stories told for nine TAT picture cards.

The TAT originally seemed an almost ideal instrument for a study of creative thinking because it was designed to elicit daydreams. Individuals were to tell stories in response to ambiguous pictures (Murray, 1943, p. 3):

> I am going to show you some pictures, one at a time; and your task will be to make up as dramatic a story as you can for each. Tell what has led up to the event shown in the picture, describe what is happening at the moment, what the characters are feeling and thinking; and then give the outcome. Speak your thoughts as they come to your mind.

The sequence of each story was to be very similar to Freud's (1908/1958) analysis of the relation of the daydream or fantasy to time. The picture provided "some provoking occasion in the present;" from there the daydream "harks back to a memory of an earlier experience;" and finally, "it

now creates a situation relating to the future which represents a fulfillment of the wish" (Freud, 1908/1959, p. 147). Each picture was to act as a trellis to support the growth and unfolding of root fantasies (Morgan & Murray, 1935).

Why the blank card was included in the 1943 set is uncertain, but the examinee was told to "see what you can see on this blank card. Imagine some picture there and describe it to me in detail." After the description, the examinee was told "Now tell me a story about it." The task of imagining a picture before telling a story about it was more faithful to Freud's concept of the sequence of a daydream than the task of telling a story for a picture card. This difference between picture card and blank card tasks was less significant, however, than their different relationships to problem finding and solving. Picture cards set problems to be solved expressively, but the blank card gave the examinee freedom to imagine a problem first.

Historically, creativity researchers have tended to be disappointed by stories told for the picture cards. Roe (1946) and others did not find much in them (apart from unusual twists) to indicate the creative talents of creative subjects. The task for the blank card, however, has been

thought to be different. Analysts have long thought the blank card might challenge the creativity of subjects (e.g., Henry, 1956), but it appears never to have been used in major studies of creativity. For the purposes of my study of creative thinking, it was embedded 9th in a standard set of 10 cards, the other 9 cards presenting pictures. Standard instructions were given to the examinees (all college students in an educational psychology course), with the exception that for the blank card, the examinee's description of the imagined picture was not separated from the task of telling a story about it. The conjunction of the problem finding and solving tasks permitted an uninterrupted flow of words from the examinee, which were tape recorded with his or her permission.

Statistical correlations of the length of response to the blank card with scores on tests of creative thinking supported the conclusion that the blank card (as opposed to picture cards) tended to evoke creative responses (Wakefield, 1986). Furthermore, as a control for verbal ability, a creativity index was devised as a ratio of blank card to picture card response length for each subject. This ratio indicated that education students majoring in the fine arts were more differentially responsive to the blank card

than any other group, including education students majoring in liberal arts and sciences, agriculture, and applied life sciences (Wakefield, in press). These quantitative findings were encouraging, and they suggested that blank card stories that were either (a) relatively long, or (b) told by fine arts students would provide a rich source for the analysis of affective origins of problem finding.

The 10 stories that fit in either or both of these categories (two overlapped) were quite variable in length. Particularly short stories in this group tended to fail to identify problematic feelings, even though the examinee might have been empathically aware of his or her own emotional state. Take, for example, this interesting story told by a student majoring in art (Case 53):

> I see a green cat sitting on a pillow. He's purring contentedly, sitting in a window he's looking out. And this cat right before, he was in this house, was before that, he was a sort of a stray. Nobody would have him because he was green. Someone was, finally felt sorry for him and took him in. And he's just sitting in this window, sort of reflecting on one of his many lives. He's on, he's on his fifth life, and he's always been a normal cat until now. And he's

sort of born a freak cat. And he's green -- sort of a long-haired green cat. And this one, this woman found him starving in the alley and took him in and fed him until he was better. And now he's found a home.

The response followed reasonably well the temporal sequence specified in the instructions, beginning in the present and going to the past, but it ended in the present and not the future. Much of the content, however, was unusual. The cat was green, despite the fact that all TAT picture cards were black and white. Furthermore, the cat was not just green, but a long-haired green cat "on his fifth life"! The central figure (the hero) was extremely unusual, suggesting that the subject was very original.

The central character may have been highly original, but no problem was perceived to motivate much of a story. Despite the details that the cat had been "sort of a stray" and was found "starving in an alley," no problematic feelings were perceived in the past or present. The central character was experiencing self-acceptance and "purring contentedly." No problem was perceived because no problem was felt in response to the blank card. Response by at least one other examinee was primarily descriptive of a joyous feeling (represented by a townscape), without a

problem to motivate a plot for a story.

More problematic feelings of a music education major motivated a response of greater length (Case 33):

> The sun beat down, and the hot wind occasionally blew this man stumbling through the desert. He wondered how he managed to lose his horse and his provisions. He was sure he was starting to delude, but for some reason he saw his entire life like the desert. He saw that all along, there never really had been anything except what just seemed like flat sand. It seemed like there was never a river of meaning running through his life to which he could always return for refreshment. As he looked at the plants around him -- the sagebrush and other desert plants -- he just, he focused on the things that had always been there, the <u>feelings that had always been there in his life regardless of the barrenness</u>. It made him wonder what would plants like that grow like if they were given as much water as they would have in a more moderate climate. Had those abilities and those dreams in his life always been there and just been unable to grow because he was never able to feed them enough water to allow them growth? Or were they, too, empty -- dried

up and blowing away like the tumbleweeds which occasionally crossed his path? . . . (emphasis added)

The feelings that emerged in response to the blank card included first, a sense of inner emptiness that was projected into a barren ladscape. The sense of emptiness was, after a few descriptive moments, joined by other feelings ("the sagebrush and other desert plants") to create a productive tension. These feelings, which were internalized in the traveler, were simultaneously projected into the landscape. As the conflict was resolved, the "plants" turned into tumbleweeds and joined the lifeless desert. The story ended with the traveler's wish to be in "a more mountainous region," where the terrain might be more "challenging."

Most of the other stories discovered a similar central element that embodied a conflict, not just took a central part in a conflict. The hero (or heroic element) in a surprising number of the stories bore some internal conflict that in a crucial way, became the motivation for the plot worked out among different elements or characters. The hero was the character with which the examinee empathized, but with no picture there, and with the character usually struggling with some internal conflict, it was clear that

the examinee was empathizing with the self to create a story.

For example, a graduate chemistry student (Case 46) began her long story with a rather simple opposition, but the real problem that motivated a story began in the mind of one of the characters:

> I see two men standing there. One of them is standing beside a horse. He's wearing buckskins, has a musket, just has it over his shoulder, looking really sort of puzzled. The other man is dressed in bluejeans, tee-shirt, standing beside a motorcycle. They're both out in the middle of the open prairie, and it's just sort of a dirt road. . . .

The opposition or conflict that began as the examinee's chosen problem was internalized first in the thoughts of the character whom we later discover to have been "up in the mountains for many, many years asleep." He did not know what to think of the situation in which he found himself, whether the man beside the motorcycle was a friend or "some friend of the devil." The internal conflict was eventually externalized through mutual suspicion, as the thoughts of the representative of modern times also became puzzled: "He doesn't know if the guy in the buckskins is just trying to

con him, whether he is cracked in the head, or whether he's really found someone who's been asleep for over 100 years."

The story thus developed a second hero, a situation that Murray (1943) described as a "endopsychic thema," or an internal dramatic situation, along the lines of Freud's (1908/1959) analysis of multiple representations of the ego in modern fiction. As indicated, the concept of empathy with oneself suggests that such internal dramatic situations are more common than previously thought. Dramatic conflict in these stories appeared to originate in some core element with which the individual author identified, the incipient drama represented by conflicting feelings. Internalization of conflict within the thoughts of a second character, however, was rare. Usually, only one character or element internalized the incipient problem.

The initially conflicted element, however, was not necessarily a character, but could be any element. A nursing student (Case 58) told a long story that began with a description of a creek in a woods and a family of beavers. The problem was not immediately apprehended, but developed slowly after the descriptions of the creek and the beavers' ability to communicate "by using spoken language, which happens to be English:"

> . . . And the beavers are preparing to go on a vacation, a journey, and they are trying to decide how they can get from this creek to a river they've heard about called the Illinois River and the town of Peoria, but these beavers are plotting among themselves, and they have their heads together and are talking very fast, and they're very hard to understand for anyone who would be trying to listen. Their tails are slapping around and they're all, they're real excited. They're very enthusiastic about their trip. And they're deciding that they're reluctant to leave their dam because they're not at all sure what Peoria will be like. . . .

The conflicting feelings were quite clearly the source of the problem that became externalized in a dramatic situation. Different family members were not associated with different feelings, but the conflicting feelings were identified with the family as a single element in this composition.

Quite clearly, enthusiasm and reluctance were the mixed feelings of the examinee that became the incipient problem. Anyone who has moved has felt this mixture of feelings, corresponding to curiosity and a need for safety.

Here, the feelings are perceived through an empathy with the self in conflict. The story is used by the examinee in a way similar to the use of poetry by the author of "Self-preservation," to prioritize the feelings. In this case, safety comes first, as the beaver family (which contemplated a move but experienced danger in the city) returned home.

Empathy with oneself can offer a means to explain the origins of artistic problems, especially when no character pre-exists with whom to sympathize and when response must be spontaneous (as for the TAT blank card). Empathy with oneself must also be managed, however, to allow for the expression of feelings. Consider the brevity of the following blank card story, for example (Case 70):

> It's perhaps like maybe the Greek myths or something where there's a character that's carried up by Zeus or something and riding through the clouds. And the white blank is what that person kind of sees at the moment. . . . it seems to be kind of labors, or whatever you want to call it.

Such a case, which was unique among fine arts students, was not rare in the group of over 50 examinees. The examinee identified with a character, as indicated by adoption of its

point of view, but there were few clues about what the character felt. The story trailed off into incoherence, but not before a reference to the labors of Hercules, or some other mythical character.

Creating a story in response to an imagined picture is an extremely difficult task. Feelings generated by the difficulty of the task or anticipated evaluation or failure, can create a distracting anxiety which overrides the expression of other feelings. In such a situation, empathy with the self inhibits expression, and the artist must mentally "shut a door" on such feelings before he or she can work productively. The artist must learn to manage empathy with the self to develop his or her artistic talent.

Conclusion

Although the theory proposed here is based on empirical findings, they are highly qualitative. This work is exploratory and intended to put previous research in perspective. Clearly, the present findings suggest that empathy with oneself is a useful theoretical concept, and can help identify how problems are found in art. Problem finding is not wholly a function of empathy, however, any more than empathy is wholly a function of problem finding. There is no reason to equate the two processes with one

another. Cognitive and metacognitive skills may also be involved in problem finding.

In particular, intuition and logic may play a role in problem finding. Symbols to communicate feeling may be apprehended through intuition, which involves the perception of possibilities (MacKinnon, 1978). Such symbols are essentially expressive because they metaphorically convey feeling (Goodman, 1976). Logic may play a role through problem representation, so that the problem is set in a solvable form rather than emerge as an unresolvable mixture of symbolized feelings. Logical techniques of problem representation are frequently referred to as strategies or concepts derived from knowledge in a field (Bransford & Stein, 1984). The strategies that artists use were not the subjects of investigation, but there is evidence elsewhere to suggest that they tend to integrate the self (Gedo, 1990). Conventions of artistic or literary composition are therapeutic in the sense that they permit acceptance and transformation of disparate and conflicting feelings. Transformation of feeling, however, is a subject more properly related to problem solving than to problem finding.

The educational implications of these findings are

somewhat problematic because so much in art rests on accurate observation and empathy with others, as the 18th-century critics pointed out. Turning a poet's thoughts inward does not necessarily make better poetry. Something needs to be learned about life first, and about poetry. The writer Eudora Welty (1984) recently noted that, "My imagination takes its strength and guides its direction from what I see and and learn and feel and remember of my living world"(p. 76). Having said this, she remarked that in The Golden Apples, the character of Miss Eckhart "stands stolidly and almost opaquely in the surround of her story, but in the making of her character out of my most inward and most deeply felt self, I would say that I have found my voice in fiction" (p. 101). The voice of an artist must be, in the beginning and the end, deeply personal. Welty did not hesitate to remind her college audience of this, that "all serious daring starts from within" (p. 104).

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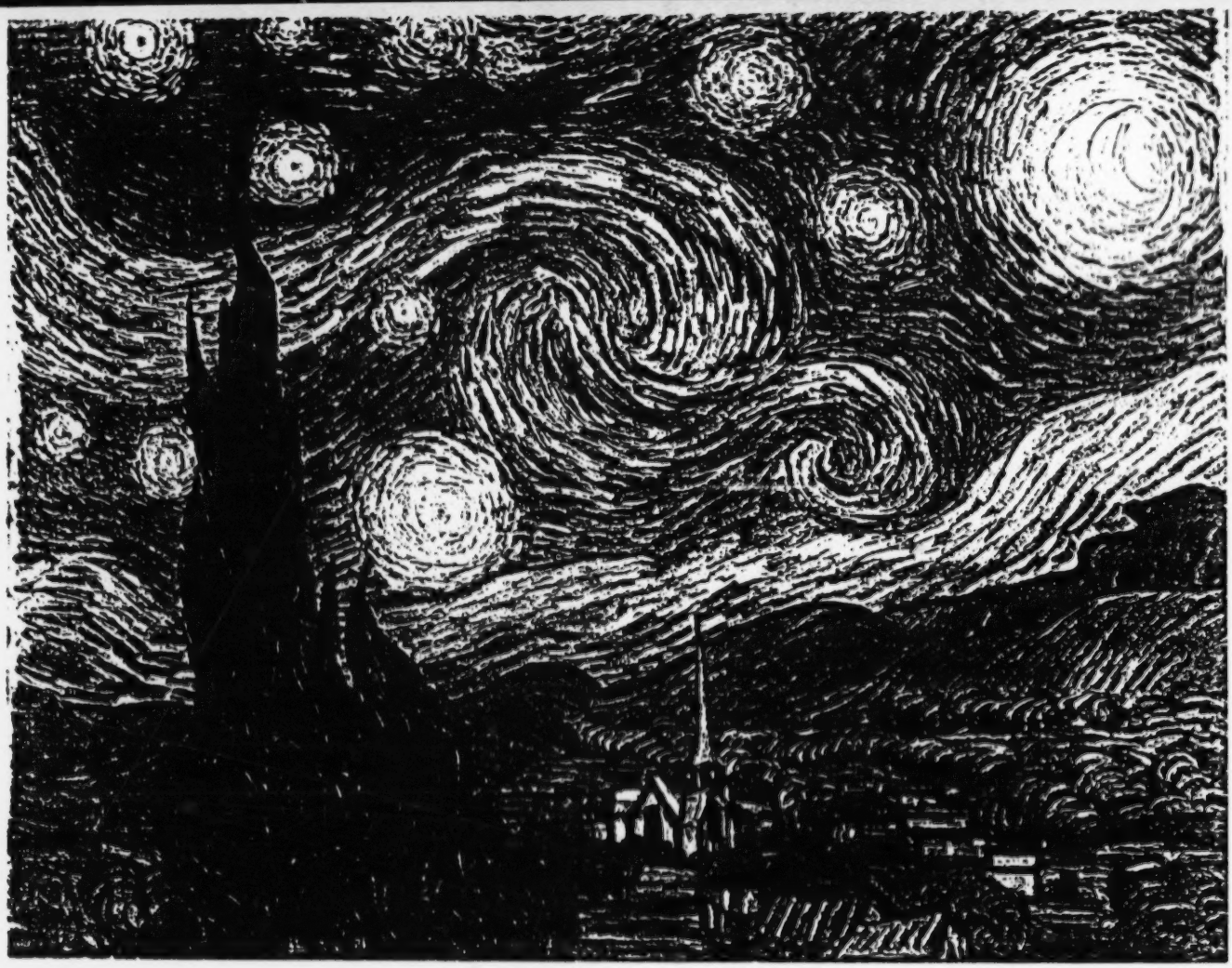

Figure Caption

Figure 1. van GOGH, Vincent. The Starry Night. (1889) Oil on cavas, 29 x 36 1/4". Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.

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